

# PUBLIC RECORDS MANAGEMENT

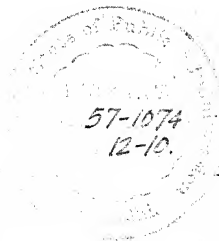
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## FOREWORD

RECORDS may be termed the "official memory" of an office, agency, or organization. In the field of government they are necessary not only for current operational purposes but beyond that, though in varying degrees, they are essential for the protection of the interests of citizens and as evidence of the work and actions of officials and agencies.

As long as there has been written record of public business the problem of handling public records has in some degree or other existed. The enormous expansion of governmental activities during the present century—and more particularly during the past two decades—has, however, vastly increased and complicated this problem. Offices in all levels of government have been confronted with complex tasks of records selection, disposal, and preservation that have taxed their resources of equipment and personnel, and while new techniques and systems have been devised to lighten the load, most government offices except federal are still without modern, economical, and workable records programs.

Public Administration Service has long been interested in the problems attending the management of public records and in techniques designed to simplify them. At its request Dr. Philip C. Brooks, Records Officer of the National Security Resources Board, formerly with the National Archives, and Chairman of the Committee on Records Administration of the Society of American Archivists, kindly undertook to prepare a brief monograph on the subject. The present pamphlet is the result of Dr. Brooks's work, in which he has had the advice and assistance of the following members and former members of the Committee, though they do not share responsibility for points of emphasis or for judgments expressed: Helen L. Chatfield, Record Officer, Bureau of the Budget, Washington, D.C.; Christopher Crittenden, Director, State Department of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina; Beatrice Decker, Municipal Archivist, Portland, Oregon; Henry H. Eddy, State Archivist, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; Hugh M. Flick, Former State Archivist, Albany, New York; Margaret C. Norton, State Archivist, Springfield, Illinois.

Because of the wide diversity of records and records problems in the various jurisdictions, it will be evident that no attempt could be made to give this pamphlet the character of an operating manual. Rather, its prime purpose is to present in simple language the things every public official should know about public records and the steps he should take with respect to those in his own office or agency. It seeks to outline general principles which can be applied, with appropriate modifications, to any office producing or housing records of public business. Dr. Brooks's monograph provides some much-needed guideposts and goals which, it is hoped, will be of assistance to administrators and others in the installation and maintenance of effective records programs.

FARRELL G. H. SYMONS  
*Chief of Publications*

# CONTENTS

FOREWORD . . . . .	iii
WHAT—AND WHY? . . . . .	1
The Importance of Records Administration . . . . .	1
What Are Records? . . . . .	1
Causes of Growth . . . . .	2
Steps in Good Records Administration . . . . .	3
CONTROLLED CREATION . . . . .	3
Are Records Planned or Do They Just Happen? . . . . .	3
Forms and Correspondence . . . . .	4
Materials and Facilities . . . . .	4
CURRENT RECORDS MANAGEMENT . . . . .	4
Authority Over Control of Records . . . . .	4
Laws and Regulations . . . . .	5
Filing Methods . . . . .	5
Decentralized Files . . . . .	5
Filing Equipment . . . . .	6
Space . . . . .	6
Protection . . . . .	6
Restrictions on Use . . . . .	7
Reference Service . . . . .	7
EVALUATION FOR RETENTION AND DISPOSAL . . . . .	8
Importance of Evaluation . . . . .	8
When Are Records Evaluated? . . . . .	8
Who Should Evaluate? . . . . .	9
Bases of Evaluation . . . . .	10
Other Factors in Evaluation . . . . .	10
The Basic Core of an Agency's Records . . . . .	11
RECORDS RETIREMENT . . . . .	11
Intermediate Depositories . . . . .	12
Reducing Bulk but Saving Content by Sampling . . . . .	12
Microfilming for Reduction of Bulk . . . . .	12
Preparation for Microfilming . . . . .	12
Legal Validity of Microfilm . . . . .	13
Criteria for Deciding to Film . . . . .	13
Disposal Authorization . . . . .	13
When to Retire—Schedules . . . . .	14
Means of Disposal . . . . .	14
Records of Disposal Action . . . . .	14
ARCHIVAL CUSTODY . . . . .	14
What Are Archives? . . . . .	14
Concentration of Archives . . . . .	15
Transfer to Archival Custody . . . . .	15
Administrative Requisites of Archival Custody . . . . .	16
WHAT A PUBLIC OFFICIAL SHOULD DO ABOUT RECORDS . . . . .	16
OBJECTIVES OF RECORDS LEGISLATION . . . . .	16
REFERENCES . . . . .	18

# PUBLIC RECORDS MANAGEMENT

## What—and Why?

Every public official uses records. They are vital to his job, for they provide information he needs to work with, they are evidence of his performance, and they protect his interests and those of the public. Yet all records are not the same, in value or in the care they require. Any official can think of some that he uses constantly and guards zealously. But there are others that just pile up. They do not have obvious current usefulness, are inactive, are not old enough to appear "historical," or are so bulky as to be a problem. They increase in proportion and in quantity as offices grow in size. Large states and the federal government accumulate astronomical quantities, which are expensive in terms of personnel, equipment, and space. Some governmental units, especially counties, on the other hand, have few kinds of records and those long fixed by laws or practices the local officials do not control. But any office, large or small, can profit by good records administration. That means conscious care from the first use of records to their final disposal or retirement. This pamphlet is designed to give the public official an outline of what he may find useful to know about the taxpayers' investment in records, and what he should do about it.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

Records are the means by which public officials in a democracy are accountable to the people. They are tools of administration, the memory of an organization, the embodiment of experience, protectors of legal rights, and sources of many kinds of information. They are often taken for granted, but they merit real attention if good government is to be realized.

Two major trends in modern government have given records administration increased importance. One is the growing recognition that administrators need to use records in studying precedents to guide their work, in establishing and protecting legal rights, and in a wide variety of research to improve the quality of administration. The other development is the increased volume, caused by the broadening scope of gov-

ernment activities that produce records and by the use of mechanical devices for multiplying them.

Control, protection, and effective use of these ever-growing quantities have made records administration a major phase of public administration. In most local offices and offices within agencies of larger governments, records handling is a subsidiary part of the work of officials and clerks. But in many local, state, and national units full-time personnel have been found necessary to deal with it. In either case employment of intelligent, well-trained personnel is vital to good records administration—it is not something for untrained recipients of favor or for those who have failed elsewhere. The essential principles are the same in all types of government, and this pamphlet is intended to explain them. It is not, however, a detailed operating manual.

What kind of forms, for example, should be devised for this new kind of license application? How many copies of it should be made in each case? Should the applications be filed alphabetically, chronologically, or some other way? How long should they be kept in current files after the licenses are issued? Will they have to be kept at hand to protect the government against claims? If so, should they be microfilmed? Do they have research or other value that warrants their being kept indefinitely? These are practical questions of the sort any public official may meet. He may find new problems that require new answers. Or he may find that in work he has been doing for years new shortcuts or devices will save him time and the taxpayer's money. No uniform solutions can be found that will suit all offices. But principles common to all form a pattern that may well be kept in mind.

### WHAT ARE RECORDS?

The term "records" is a common one, and roughly it is well understood. But in planning a records administration program, and in considering values and legal responsibilities, the public official needs a clear idea of what he is dealing with. As now generally used in government, the word "records" refers to any written or graphic materials that accumulate in public business and

give evidence of activities—the everyday working files of government plus the more formal reports, legal documents, and other instruments prepared to represent findings, recommendations, and actions or to effect other administrative purposes.

Most legal definitions emphasize three salient points. These are that records (1) are of various physical types including papers, books (except library materials), maps, still or motion photographic films and prints, and sound recordings; (2) are created or received in the course of public business; and (3) are filed or intended to be preserved as evidence of transactions or for their informational value. Unique copies are usually meant, not supplies of items printed or otherwise duplicated for general distribution. Master files of these in the producing offices, however, may be regarded as records. Two or more copies of the same document may be records because they are filed in different offices or serve different purposes. But copies (usually carbons) sent to another office solely for information and not action, and some ephemeral material, may at the discretion of the administrator be discarded without ever being filed.

This definition of records is much broader than that used in most county governments to define those "public records" that must be kept a long time and open to public inspection, such as deeds, mortgages, vital statistics, and minute books. It is a practical explanation, covering the materials accumulating in public offices in relation to the purpose of their creation and to their ultimate use.

"Records" as used here may mean, for example, files of correspondence, interoffice memoranda, fiscal ledgers, vouchers, personnel files, clinical files of hospitals, photographs of progress on construction jobs, maps, or negatives and master prints of motion pictures produced by government agencies, as well as marriage registers and title or tract books.

Calling these records does not mean that all of them have to be kept for a long time. They are records even if they serve for only a short time. The selection of those to be kept for various periods is a separate phase of records administration from the definition, and a challenging one.

#### CAUSES OF GROWTH

The rate of growth of records has risen amazingly in recent years, and for reasons other than

simply the increase of the population concerned. Mechanical developments, notably wide adoption of the typewriter, carbon paper, and cheap duplicating processes, have been prime factors. With the typewriter more records can be made in the same number of working hours than before, and officials have naturally thought more about creating documents to meet every conceivable need than about dangers of crowding the files. Carbon paper has made it easy to produce many copies of the same item, so that the making of excessive numbers of copies is quite normal. Stencil, gelatin, and other duplicating processes have multiplied the volume still further.

All these devices have contributed to a trend away from entering records into books (other than county records of the register type) or binding sheets together in book form. Naturally, masses of loose papers can pile up more easily than when they were handled by slower processes. It has not been hard for them to get out of control, and sometimes to be wrapped up and forgotten. File supervisors have had little to say about record creation, have had their eyes on producing files to meet all needs, and have given too little attention to control of volume.

The operations requiring receipt or creation of records have constantly grown, meanwhile, with new kinds of taxation, motor vehicle licensing and control, unemployment and old age benefits, scientific crime detection and punishment, public care for health, and innumerable other new phases of governmental activity in state, county, and local fields. Many of the new kinds of records series have been big ones, for these measures of government affect the lives of an increasing proportion of the citizenry. There is likely to be a file relating to the same Mr. Jones in each of several different state, county, and city or town offices, let alone those in the federal government.

The rate of growth varies. Wars, depressions, and other catastrophes bring peak loads. In war-time civilian defense, selective service, production controls, labor activities, and housing problems are among the big record producers, and countless files from World War II are still on hand. Economic depressions bring relief and increased welfare activities that require more paper work and more files.

State officials, city managers, county commissioners, and their colleagues should remember that every new tax plan, new institution, or new



control program will pile up new bodies of records. The cost of creating, using, maintaining, and retiring these records must be realized, and plans should be made so that they will be handled in the most useful and economical manner.

#### STEPS IN GOOD RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

Five phases of records administration provide the framework of this pamphlet. Attention to them as parts of an integrated process will make for efficient operations and do much to protect the interests of the government, the taxpayers, and the historians and other research users. They are: (1) control of creation of records; (2) effective handling while they are in current use; (3) wise selection for retention and disposal; (4) retirement by transfer to intermediate storage, transfer to an archives, or disposal; and (5) effective archival administration of those that should be retained. Over and above all these is the need for sound planning, for competent personnel, and for adequate resources given them to do the job.

### Controlled Creation

The records problem should be considered in terms of the life history of records. At every step, from creation through use to final disposal or retention in archives, care is needed. In their creation records cost money—for paper, ink, typewriters or other machines, space, filing equipment, and most of all for personnel to handle them. This is one reason for creating records in only a minimum quantity, and those well planned. Records are useful for the information they contain. Administrators—and, later, historians or other research workers—want to get at the information quickly, without having to wade through useless or disorderly files. Thus, at the very earliest step one must consider the uses to which records are to be put.

#### ARE RECORDS PLANNED OR DO THEY JUST HAPPEN?

Orderly records creation involves (1) orderly administration in general; (2) sound, purposeful plans for all records created; and (3) effective use of materials. A well organized, serviceable file is always a sign of efficient general administration, and the reverse is usually true. Clear-cut organization of an office, with the functions of each unit well defined and without overlapping duties,

allows clear-cut planning and control of records.

Not that all records are consciously planned by the persons who create them. The majority are created to accomplish immediate tasks in administration, and their purpose as records is secondary, though important. Correspondence, for example, and most forms are composed or designed first to do the jobs at hand. Their content and pattern are not chosen because of the way they will serve as records, but if they are well planned for the job at hand, they can be well handled as records.

Ideally, one might hope that an administrator would decide what record is to be made of any activity, how much information should be set down for the guidance of others involved in the same transaction, how much as evidence of his own action, and how much for future reference. In planning a new procedure or in analyzing the management of an office, these questions may well be asked.

Each type of record should be designed to serve a worthwhile purpose, either to convey information from one person to another, or solely to preserve information for future reference. Its passage through administrative channels, even in a small office, should follow a clear-cut pattern. It is a maxim of good administration that an office should be in such order that if an official or employee should suddenly die his successor would be able to take over and understand his operations without delay. Even though he remains on the job in the best of health human memory fades so that he cannot remember every detail: files therefore have rightly been called the memory of an office. For these reasons every kind of record should be clearly identified by author, subject, place, and date. Each addition, approval, or other action should be similarly identified. Files should be self-explanatory, and procedures outlined in writing.

But, one may say, most officials and employees have little to say about the methods they follow. Laws, especially with respect to counties where many records are made expressly to serve record purposes rather than incidentally in the course of current operation, prescribe what is to be done. Procedures handed down from top level offices dictate forms, procedures, and even filing practices. But the laws and the procedures derive in the long run from local needs, and may in the long run be modified. One can only exhort law-

makers and procedure writers to remember good management principles when prescribing activities that involve paper work. That this is no vain hope is seen in the fact that they usually depend on the technical advice of those who do the spade-work.

#### FORMS AND CORRESPONDENCE

Examples of economies in record making may be seen in the management of forms and of correspondence. Many steps in recording information can be saved by careful use of forms and form letters. But forms without adequate identification can be confusing. Forms design and correspondence planning are important phases of modern management; the essentials are clear to anyone. Forms should be designed for easy filling-in, whether by hand or by machine; for creation of the least essential number of copies; for size and format best suited to office procedures and filing equipment; for clear understanding; and for prompt segregation and disposal of those of only temporary value. Any office, however small, can well analyze its forms with these objectives in mind. Any office can work best with clear, written instructions available for the use of each form. Correspondence, especially in a large office, should likewise be so managed that time is spent on giving only essential information, that form letters are used for frequent mailings of the same information, that the smallest necessary number of copies is made, and that each prescribed copy has a definitely planned use and eventual fate. Correspondence can be the most difficult material to handle in filing, especially when subjects are confused without clear definition.

#### MATERIALS AND FACILITIES

Wise selection of materials and of record making devices is vital in good management and materially affects the current and future use of records. Many state governments have for years recognized this by laws requiring that specified qualities of paper and inks be used for records that will have enduring legal value, such as deed books and marriage registers. The same rules can be applied to important correspondence, registers, reports, and other documents of obvious value.

Economy also requires that work sheets, requisitions, and memoranda of transitory value be put on sulphite or other inexpensive paper. Likewise

carbon papers and other materials should be of quality suited to the need.

Use of materials often involves the actual method of recording. Not only should appropriate paper be chosen for records made in longhand or on the typewriter; attention must also be given to modern methods and the complex problems which arise from the use of them. Many county recorders, for example, have found it more accurate, as well as economical, to record deeds by photographic means than by making longhand or typed copies. Likewise clerks and others working with large name files often find tabulating punch cards useful for indexes as well as for statistical analysis. Each new method proposed raises questions of suitability, equipment, filing arrangement, utilization, and the means of making additional copies.

All these decisions depend on the attention given to what is worth recording in the first place, how the records will be used, and how long the administrator and research worker will need them. Decisions should be made systematically and be themselves recorded by manuals of procedure, so that employees can follow the rules and administrators will not have to solve the same problems repeatedly.

#### Current Records Management

Records of all kinds need to be arranged and kept in such a manner that they can readily be used. They must be protected against all hazards. Personnel and procedures must be adequate to give reference service on them. These requirements involve many practical considerations.

#### AUTHORITY OVER CONTROL OF RECORDS

In an office staffed by more than half a dozen persons records are usually under the immediate care of someone other than the official responsible for their creation. This is often a person who spends much or all of his time on records. Close cooperation and understanding between him and the administrator are highly important. The administrator does not need to know the details of filing, but he should understand the general plan of the files. The records custodian, on the other hand, needs to know as much as possible about the functions of the office and the laws governing its operations. The larger the office the more involved the problems and the more the

records custodian becomes a specialist and even an administrator in his own field.

#### LAWS AND REGULATIONS

Authority over current records is not usually limited to the office or department possessing them. County records, especially, are largely controlled in detail by laws that govern their character and their methods of handling. But many suburban counties in recent years have increased their quasi-municipal functions, and have some records different from the traditional pattern of counties. In state governments controls are often established by laws and by regulations of central agencies dealing with such matters as personnel, purchasing, and finance. Both administrators and records custodians need to know these widely varying requirements thoroughly. Laws governing records frequently require that certain series be kept in protective equipment; they define which records must be kept open to the public and which must be confidential; and they require that records be maintained in good condition. Administrators and records custodians can find guidance on these matters, if they are not already well informed through experience, from an attorney general, corporation counsel, or other legal official.

#### FILING METHODS

The filing of records usually involves decisions which can best be made by the persons who do the work and know the needs, with respect to arrangement or classification and also facilities. These matters depend basically on analysis of the functions of the office, the kinds of records to be filed, and the reference needs to be served. Here again the administrator and the custodian of records can best work together.

Filing schemes should represent the organization and main functions of the office. In that way they constitute the most accurate evidence of operations, and that is the way in which reference is most likely to be made to the files. Thus, in most offices one part of the general files will deal with administrative matters including organization, policies, and housekeeping—the activities that are necessary to keep any organization going. Other parts, constituting the bulk of the files, will be arranged by major functions, constituting the end result which the agency was set up to achieve. Aside from general files such as these, many kinds of special files will be arranged in comparatively

large series by name, number, or some other order according to their kind and their probable use. From the myriad schemes available in books and commercial offerings one should choose carefully in relation to basic purpose.

Schemes and the symbols used in them should be as simple as possible. A correspondence file to which only a few items are added daily can well be organized by a simple alphabetic subject scheme. A file of a hundred thousand applications for licenses, on the other hand, may have to be subdivided by geographical areas, or the whole put into an alphabetic name series with phonetic groupings. One would not enter rapidly growing series of items into blank books with fixed spaces provided for letters in the alphabet, because the amount of space needed for any given letter could not be foreseen. The same is true of a rigid scheme for filing correspondence. These are but examples of problems in selecting filing arrangement.

#### DECENTRALIZED FILES

In large municipal and state offices questions arise over the growth of diverse uncontrolled file units within the same organization, though the majority of county and smaller municipal offices will have no problem on this score. Efficient operation demands that files be kept close enough to working offices to be readily accessible. On the other hand, completeness of the record, economy of filing personnel and equipment, and efficiency of reference service argue for centralized control.

The best solution to the problem is that beyond the point where one central file adequately serves an organization, there should be decentralized files with centralized control. Decentralized files mean a separate file room for each unit of an organization which is substantially autonomous in operation, has functions unique to it, and has adequate facilities for taking care of the records. Physical location is important. An effort to bring current records of several offices, located some distance apart, together into one central file room may have disastrous results. Actual need of files by working offices may result in their simply not sending material despite regulations, thus defeating the purpose of the central file.

Centralized control of decentralized files means that while autonomous units have their own record rooms, the records officer for the whole organization develops filing methods (in close co-



operation with the operating office); trains file personnel (or, better, actually employs and assigns it); has the right of access and inspection; and keeps running accounts of what series and at what rates the offices are accumulating. Decentralized records thus controlled will best serve the needs of the whole agency, can be most economically managed, and will best fit into an integrated records retirement program.

### FILING EQUIPMENT

In the selection of equipment, officials are often torn between economy and the attractiveness of new devices. The economical use of filing equipment is one measure of effective records administration. Requests for additional equipment may possibly indicate to the responsible official that records are reaching excessive volume.

Complex equipment should not be used unless there is a specific need for it. Most of the new devices on the market are designed to serve special purposes, and these should be carefully investigated before purchases are made. Equipment should fit the need both with respect to kind of operation and physical requirements. For example, the general use of legal-sized filing cabinets when most of the material to be filed is letter-sized is wasteful in every way. By the same token, boxes into which records do not fit snugly are wasteful and will result in damage to the records as well as difficulty of reference service. Placing books that can stand on shelves in filing cabinets designed for loose papers is a common inefficient practice.

While economy is essential, however, one must remember that personnel costs more than equipment and, furthermore, is subject to human emotions. Competent employees may justly feel discouraged when made to work without proper tools. These are principles of good management everywhere, but they need emphasis in records units because unfortunately it is only too frequently the practice to provide the worst facilities for the files.

### SPACE

Along with equipment one must consider space, either to improve the use of present facilities or in planning new ones. Here again the files are often considered last. Space for current records should be close to working offices; that for semi-current records can be more remote and inexpensive but should still not be completely out of

reach. Estimates of space needs should be based upon careful analyses of the quantities of records created per year, what portions of them need to be kept in an active status, and what their physical forms will be. In large operations space engineers can be of real assistance to records officers, as their knowledge of space calculating methods, floor loads, and other technical matters is important.

Here again it is vital to consider personnel, for the employees who have just complaint for lack of adequate equipment will be equally unable to work without adequate working space for sorting and other activities, and without adequate light, air, and heat.

### PROTECTION

Equipment and space are closely linked to the problems of protection, but this is really a broader subject. It involves protection against normal wear and tear as well as against the more obvious catastrophes. Like every other step in records administration it is based upon analysis of the records, their purpose of creation, and their value for all conceivable uses. All records need reasonable protection as assets in which a government has invested part of its resources. But one will recognize certain classes of records as irreplaceable; some containing information that would have to be replaced at all cost if the records were lost; others of high intrinsic or sentimental value but which would not absolutely have to be replaced to keep the government running; and many of less importance. Protective measures must be chosen accordingly, a balance always being sought between economy and the exercise of maximum caution.

Protection against ordinary wear and tear calls for many simple measures frequently either forgotten or taken for granted. Good housekeeping, the use of adequately strong folders or binders, avoidance of unnecessary folding, and care in handling are among these matters of common sense. Recent developments offer additional safeguards well worth investigating, such as the lamination of valuable or frequently used papers with cellulose acetate foil and the making of photographic copies for daily use to prevent wear of originals.

Among potential casualties the greatest menace is fire. The losses of deed books, marriage registers, wills, and other vital records in burned court-

houses have been costly beyond estimate, and fire authorities say most such losses are preventable. This is one field in which local officials can find a wealth of advice, chiefly from local fire authorities and from national organizations, particularly the National Fire Protection Association in Boston. The greatest protection comes in fireproof buildings adequately guarded, and in fireproof vaults. Arrangement for separate portions of buildings, if not whole buildings, for records so that special protective measures can be taken is advisable wherever a substantial volume of material is present. Not only fire, but the major related hazards—water damage, shock from explosions, and theft in unguarded hours after a fire—must be given consideration.

Vaults or safe-type filing equipment are available in many degrees of protective construction that need careful analysis by purchasing officials. It is common knowledge that steel cabinets alone may be a greater fire hazard than other kinds of files if proper insulation is not provided. Costs of protective devices rise greatly with the degree of security, and the most careful planning is warranted. World War II brought an added consciousness of the need of protection and considerable development in techniques. Future wars are not so remote a possibility as to prevent their being taken into account in the planning of record space. For whatever purpose, combinations of fireproof construction, adequate fire prevention and guarding, and vaults or other protective equipment are better than reliance on any one of these measures. In the numerous states where laws exist covering the protection of vital records, authoritative information is readily at hand for the local official.

One method of protection widely used in recent years is the making of security copies. In this field especially, the last war emphasized the need. The most common method of making such copies is by microfilm, since it is relatively inexpensive, is easy to move from one place to another, is more accurate than mechanical or longhand copies, and can be easily reproduced. For this as well as for other purposes, however, microfilming must be used cautiously. Preparation of records for filming involves costs that are often several times as great as the cost of the film. Unless records are well arranged and carefully indexed they cannot easily be located on film. Furthermore, the need to certify to the completeness of microfilm offers

legal complications, though they are not insurmountable. Direct image photographic prints, made by several processes, are comparatively expensive and save no space.

#### RESTRICTIONS ON USE

Protection against unauthorized access can in many cases be provided by the same measures that guard against physical hazards. Obviously, vital records need to be put in locked equipment to thwart thieves. Protection from persons who may make unlawful use of records requires, in addition, precise rules as to restrictions and competent personnel to supervise their use. Records containing personal information about employees, relief applicants, hospital patients, and other individuals having business with a government may legitimately be considered confidential. Records of legal investigations must often be kept "under wraps" to protect individuals and to avoid jeopardizing the prosecution of cases. Business and financial records that might reveal confidential data about commercial firms to their competitors may properly be restricted.

Underlying these bases of restrictions, however, is the fundamental principle that government in a democracy is public business. In all cases the assumption should be that records of government are open to the public unless some special reason, such as those cited above, properly rules otherwise. Protection of officials against "administrative embarrassment" is not a legitimate cause for restriction, for the obvious reason that it would cover misfeasance and malfeasance as well as honest errors. Such is the rule of living in the "goldfish bowl" of public service.

#### REFERENCE SERVICE

The purpose of creating all records is to put down information that may be used at some time. Therefore, reference service is the ultimate goal of all records administration. Generally, it falls into two categories: service on current files given by a file room, and service on noncurrent records. The latter may be given by a file room, an intermediate depository, or an archival agency. The centralization or decentralization of reference service in a large organization is subject to the same arguments as the centralization of the files themselves, and may be answered on the same basis—the greatest utility consistent with adequate protection of the records.

Certain principles are common to reference service on records wherever it is performed in government. In the first place, government records belong to the people governed, who have a right to expect their needs to be met. The custodian should therefore make records available and provide information or allow inspection of records unless some valid rule prohibits. Unreasonable requests must naturally be declined, as must calls that benefit one citizen at substantial expense to the whole body politic. The custodian should publish the restrictions on access and the regulations governing use of records, so that all citizens may enjoy in practice equal rights to the use of an investment which they support by taxes.

In this phase of records work competent personnel is perhaps more essential than in others. This competence embraces technical knowledge of records handling, thorough knowledge of the organization producing the records, detailed familiarity with the materials themselves and how to find information in them, ability to deal tactfully with a variety of persons, and the capacity to present the results of searches intelligently in oral or written form.

Service on current files is usually for the benefit of administrators in the producing agency, and involves specific documents or items of information of quite recent date. This service is usually given by the persons who do the initial filing, although in very large offices specialization develops. Thus, service on current files is usually only part of an employee's job, and one closely integrated with the day-by-day operations of the organizations.

Reference service on noncurrent records, however, whether it be in a county recorder's office, a state records office, or elsewhere, is likely to be for a variety of customers, involving numerous items of information or many related documents, and possibly dealing with quite old material. These factors point up the need for specially trained employees for this particular work. The recorder's assistant who has charge of deeds may serve attorneys with cases in the county court, engineers planning construction projects, or historians studying the early settlement of the region decades ago. This employee must know the functions of the recorder as they have developed through the years, the records as they have been modified by changes in procedure, the kinds usually significant in court, the terms used by engi-

neers in locating and describing property, and something of the varied ways and interests of historians and genealogists. These requirements may be surprising to the official who has to employ such an assistant, but experience will prove them to be necessary.

## Evaluation for Retention and Disposal

### IMPORTANCE OF EVALUATION

Valuable records can provide the best service, be most economically handled, and form the best archives for the future only if they are clearly identified and segregated from other materials. This means that many administrators and every records official should think about selection, with due regard for legal requirements. The difficulty of selection varies widely, but several basic principles apply to small or large bodies of records, simple or complex.

Records usually must be retained either because the actual pieces of paper have intrinsic value for their connection with some important person, event, or period; or because the information contained in the records is important no matter in what form it is preserved. These factors overlap, but the second exists far more frequently than the first.

### WHEN ARE RECORDS EVALUATED?

Evaluation takes place at every step in the life history of records, and thus cannot be left entirely to the archivists. First is their creation. Plans for the ceremony of signing an interstate compact, laws requiring certain series of record books, plans for recording an important conference all involve the creation of records that will have both intrinsic and informational value. Such materials will naturally be put on good quality paper and be carefully handled. It is the expected value of the records that determines the facilities and methods of handling. Conversely, third carbons of memoranda and slips used to note telephone calls received in an official's absence, for example, should be put on inexpensive stock because their prospective value will not warrant long retention.

Evaluation also takes place in the preferred treatment given valuable records in current management and in physical protection. But it is most evident at the time when decisions are made as to disposal or retention. These decisions may well be made before the time for disposal or transfer to an archives has arrived—the earlier they are made



the better. In small offices where the rate of accumulation is low, or wherever the future use of records is uncertain, evaluation may properly be made when current use is completed. Disposal is not as urgent in most states and counties as it is in a few large states, in the federal government, and in industry. Yet concentration on valuable records and riddance of useless papers is good business in any office.

#### WHO SHOULD EVALUATE?

Evaluation is important and challenging, but not difficult if the right points of view are employed. It requires knowledge both of the organization that produces the materials and of the probable uses to which they may be put. It requires an open mind to recognize the public obligation to preserve records for all legitimate users, and to see beyond the immediate interests of the official in charge at any given time.

This thought raises the question: Who should decide what to keep and what to throw away? Several persons have important parts in the task, and no one official should act alone. The *official in charge* of an office, for example, knows the reason for creating records, the significance of the events they represent, and whether or not all phases of those events have been completely recorded. He is likely to know better than anyone else what legal responsibilities of the government agency are involved. He may have some view as to how important a given set of files would be for the study of administrative precedent. His advice, therefore, must be heard.

The *records custodian*, or it may be the file supervisor, who cares for records still in current or semicurrent stages, must usually take the initiative in selection. He knows better than any one official the relation of a given file to others in the same office, and especially to those in other agencies of the same government. The records custodian in the office of a district attorney, for example, should know the relationship of the files on criminal cases kept by the district attorney and by the court in which the cases are tried. The records officer of a state agency should know the relationship of the personnel service records in his agency to those of the same employees kept by the state civil service commission.

Furthermore, the records custodian knows the actual use made of records. He can tell whether a given file series has become inactive for admin-

istrative purposes, or whether the small number of calls that may be made on it are sufficiently important to warrant retention. And he knows better than the administrative official the technical problems that may be encountered if a certain file is to be retained indefinitely.

The *legal authority* of a state, county, or municipality should be consulted in many if not all cases before records are disposed of. Many general legal responsibilities of the government to its citizens, and especially the rights of claimants against the government, fall within his special knowledge. This is particularly true, for one example, of purchase contracts controlled by general laws and subject to complex statutes of limitation.

But even all these authorities, concerned properly with current responsibilities of administration, cannot reasonably be expected to know all the potential values of records. An *archivist*, a *historical agency official*, a *private historian*, or in lieu of any of these a *librarian* should be consulted for his understanding of intrinsic values of documents, knowledge of varied research uses, and historical perspective.

Such a person can best appreciate the significance of a charter, address, photograph, sound recording, or other item that should be preserved not because of unique information but because the document played a part in historic events or was handled by important persons. Moreover, such an authority should know something of the interests of the government research specialist, the historian, the biographer, the economist, the statistician, the genealogist, and many others who have valid reason to expect their government to preserve the materials they need.

The archivist, historian, or librarian should also be able to appraise the values of records from a long-range point of view, fitting the significance of recent events into the sequence of past, present, and future. He should prevent the careless disposal of correspondence of some major official just because "it's not old enough to be historical," an action which is by no means infrequent. He should likewise ensure the preservation of records containing important information which is not needed at present, but which would be needed in a future depression, war, or other emergency. And he should realize that in years to come records now closed because of their confidential nature may be opened.



## BASES OF EVALUATION

The discussion of who should evaluate has shown that several points of view must be borne in mind. First is the usefulness of records to the agency in which they accumulate, even beyond the period of current use. Many important series must be retained indefinitely for further administrative use by the agency that created or used them.

In a large city, county, or state government the points of view of agencies of that government other than the one where records are filed must be borne in mind. Reference has been made to the relationship of personnel service records in an operating agency to those in the state civil service commission. The latter may not have all the information it needs in retirement or other cases, and will have an interest in the preservation of service records by the operating agencies. In the fiscal field, the central auditing agency usually has rules for keeping stated series of ledgers, vouchers, paid checks or warrants, and other records. These are necessary not only in current auditing and settlement of accounts, but also may be used for years in protecting the government against claim cases.

The interests of the citizen in a democracy have been mentioned before, and cannot be stressed too heavily. Most of the long-established series of records in county offices are valuable because they contain evidence of the citizen's rights under the law, or of his obligations to society. Thus birth, marriage, and death records have obvious bearing on citizenship, inheritance, and all the educational and other benefits derived from citizenship. Deed and mortgage records protect the citizen's property rights. Election registers protect his right to participate in government. Tax returns record the meeting of certain obligations. Court and police records may prove his civil rights or his clearance of offense charges, or they may document his obligations to society if he is on parole or probation.

Less obvious than these illustrations of records pertaining to the citizen are many vital series in larger governmental organizations. They may record his license to practice a profession, his payment of fees for services, and a host of other details. Or from a different point of view they may be evidence of how the government has functioned—reports, accounts, testimony at hearings,

minutes of meetings, and files on projects such as school construction—all of which he should be entitled to examine in order to see how his chosen representatives have performed and how his taxes have been spent.

A fourth major point of view to be borne in mind is that of research. No one can strictly define research interests, for they include those of the historian, the genealogist, the economist, the geographer, the political scientist, to cite the most significant examples. Many administrative officials are familiar with the work of local historians in studying the settlement, geographical development, economic evolution, and governmental history of a town, county, or city. They are also acquainted with the many active programs of marking historic sites and writing biographies of important individuals. These activities meet the interest of the people in the growth of the communities in which they live.

Not so well known, probably, are studies by specialists of population trends which are vital in planning school expansion; of industrial history that may contribute to economic planning of a city; of social welfare cases that illustrate problems of relief, charity, and juvenile delinquency; or of administrative methods that contribute to the technique of government. Examples could be cited almost indefinitely showing how records may have research value not suspected by their custodians.

## OTHER FACTORS IN EVALUATION

The age of records, their frequency of use, and the cost of preserving them in relation to their value need also to be considered. Time alone is not an adequate basis for deciding whether or not a batch of records should be kept. Older records are generally more interesting than recent ones. But the real point about older records is that they are more likely to contain unique information. Activities of the last century were not so voluminously recorded in the first place, and various causes have brought the loss of many of them, fortunately or otherwise. Thus, for any given event or person of 1850 one is less likely to find records than for a similar subject of 1930. Yet an event of 1850 may be less important than one of 1930. It is not enough to say that what happened fifty years ago seems of historical importance simply because it is old; what happened yesterday will someday be just as historic.

Frequency of use is important, but should not be the sole determining factor. Here again, to labor the point would be to stress the obvious. But one group of records used frequently for genealogical inquiries may not actually be as valuable to the government and the people as another group of similar age and volume which may be used only once a year but each time in a legal case involving thousands of dollars.

The cost of preservation must also be considered: one cannot evaluate properly in a theoretical vacuum disregarding practical matters. For example, if a series of vouchers would protect the government against nonpayment claims involving fifty thousand dollars they should be retained, because the storage and upkeep costs on a mass of records could be paid for many years for that amount. The difficulty is that whereas costs of preservation can be measured (with some difficulty) the value of records can hardly ever be measured in advance in terms of money. Most uses of records do not have such cash values as those in the legal case suggested above, and even if they did one could seldom foresee those values in advance. Consequently, one is bound to evaluate in terms of the probable and legitimate use that is expected to be profitable to the government or to the citizens, including research workers in the latter category.

#### THE BASIC CORE OF AN AGENCY'S RECORDS

The basic purpose must be to preserve those series that represent vital interests of the government or the people, and those records that adequately document the operations of government agencies. For the latter objective the best approach is to analyze the structure and functions of the organization, and to retain those records pertaining to the most important elements. In doing so one will naturally hit upon the basic legal documents authorizing the agency's activity; the correspondence of its top officials (and correspondence is generally of more research value than administrators may realize); the minutes of its governing board or committee; a master file of organization papers, orders, instructions, procedural outlines, and published reports; unpublished reports of operating units; maps and photographs that define the scope of the agency's activities and illustrate their character; basic fiscal ledgers and evidences of payment; at least skeleton service records of its personnel, sufficient to

document retirement claims and to support the biographies of key officials; and such records of its specialized operations as may be selected as best representing particular activities the agency was established to perform.

#### Records Retirement

Once records have become inactive for their original administrative use, what should be done with them? Retention means constant care, and even throwing them out is not always simple. The result of evaluation may show that records should be retained indefinitely, kept in intermediate storage for a limited time, eliminated periodically after stated numbers of years, or eliminated at once. In most large offices the majority of the records can properly be disposed of at stated intervals—but the purpose of disposal is fully as much to protect the valuable records as it is to effect money savings in space.

As in evaluation, the administrative agency should perform that part of the job that is closely tied to its current operations, but some phases of records retirement in large governments can better be performed by special agencies. When the emphasis ceases to be on current use and becomes a matter of long-time custody, analysis, and reference service, then the job is one for a public records office or archival agency. This is true because the appropriations made to administrative agencies are for performance of the jobs they were created to do. In any agency except the records office or archives the care of records is not a main purpose but a contributory function. It is true also because the records office has specialists who can perform the tasks cited most economically.

Records to be retained indefinitely may, of course, be kept in the office where they were originally filed, as in county offices whose primary function is long-range recording of vital statistics or titles. But for most municipal and state agencies, as for those in the federal government, records of enduring value should go to a records office or archives. Some essentials of such agencies are discussed, from the point of view of the operating agency administrator, in the next section of this pamphlet. Still other alternatives are transfer to intermediate custody for a limited period of time, reduction of bulk by some means that preserves the essential content, and outright disposal. These merit further brief discussion here.

### INTERMEDIATE DEPOSITORIES

Records that need to be kept for a limited period for legal or fiscal reasons, that cannot be evaluated until more time has passed, or that are semicurrent but too voluminous for the operating agency to handle in current working space may often be best handled in intermediate depositories. Significant developments in this field were made years ago by the State Archives of Illinois, and during World War II by the federal War and Navy departments. The essence of these depositories is that they provide economical though adequate facilities for protection of records, allow occasional use if necessary, and prevent uncontrolled accumulation—none of which are provided by “dead” storage.

Intermediate depositories are appropriate, for example, in large state or municipal governments. They may be directly under the control of operating agencies that have large records problems, or centrally administered by the archival agency. Depositories for records of industry, with the same objectives, are being developed by several large firms and by the National Records Management Council. Centrally administered depositories may provide facilities, the records remaining under the control of operating agencies (as in Illinois), or title to the records may actually pass if the depositories are run by the archival agency.

### REDUCING BULK BUT SAVING CONTENT BY SAMPLING

Saving of samples often solves records retirement problems by minimizing costs of preservation and still preserving the essential content of records. This may be worth while even in small organizations, but costs of preservation must be judged in relation to available resources, and may be more serious in small agencies than in large ones. Sampling may consist either of selection of examples, or of statistically sound cross-sectional sampling. The former is useful for illustration of methods used in an office, kinds of problems encountered, forms used, and other needs that do not depend on quantity analysis. One might save samples of license application forms, civil service examinations, or building permits that would show types of construction. It would not be necessary to do this for any given time period or in any certain proportion.

One dangerous and uneconomical practice, to be used only with caution, is that of piece by piece weeding, especially in correspondence files. This

is time-consuming, and the subjective judgment of one person is likely to cause uneven or incomplete selection. Furthermore, the value of the residue only rarely compensates for the cost of this kind of selection.

Cross-sectional sampling is adaptable to records that may be used in statistical analysis. In the federal government, for example, income tax returns are far too voluminous for all of them to be retained; but selected blocks by series numbers have been retained. Statistical studies of average incomes, fluctuation in incomes, and other data from these samples will give economists of the future cross-sections of the whole picture that can be used in much the way that public opinion polls endeavor to measure the whole from a few selected indications. The same method might be used for inspection records, municipal tax files, mortgage and claims reports, and other local records, though it has not been widely applied to them so far.

### MICROFILMING FOR REDUCTION OF BULK

Microphotography is the answer to records retirement problems in many cases: the test lies in determining which cases. It has the advantages of about 98 per cent space reduction; speed of finding records if they are properly filmed; accuracy of reproduction in contrast with typing or other methods; and the possibility of providing security simply by making an extra copy of the film. But microphotography is not a panacea for all records ills. It frequently requires expensive preparation that offsets the savings, and if applied inappropriately may create prohibitive obstacles to use of the records.

Application of microphotography depends on which of several purposes is in mind. Initial creation of records on film, as in the billing process of many department stores, is one. Duplication in order to send copies of materials to some other place, or to avoid exposing originals to current use, as in the work of many libraries, is another. Records retirement by microfilm, in which paper originals are completely supplanted by film, is still different, and because of legal requirements may necessitate more evidence of what has been filmed, and when and why.

### PREPARATION FOR MICROFILMING

Preparation that must be considered includes technical aspects such as provision of the proper



film and cameras, assurance of careful processing of the film after it is exposed, and availability of devices for using the film. Cellulose acetate "safety" film is usually used. The National Bureau of Standards provides standard specifications for the film base, as it does for the chemical elements of processing. Various cameras are used, some taking single exposures and some being high-speed continuous machines. Readers for examining records once they are filmed vary widely and are developing rapidly; the same is true of printers for making paper images from the microfilm. All these technical operations except actual use of the film may be handled by photographic companies on contract, or equipment can be rented or purchased. Decisions on these matters depend on circumstances, and should be carefully studied.

Preparation also involves getting records ready for filming. This may mean removing folders and clips, and it may include actual arrangement of disordered material and provision of a filing scheme. If such work is needed, costs that are not really chargeable to microfilming, but are necessary to its accomplishment, may make a job impracticable. In any event, the order that records will take on the film must be decided and finding devices provided before the filming. The order cannot feasibly be changed after microfilming.

#### LEGAL VALIDITY OF MICROFILM

Legal uses requiring submission of records as evidence affect many decisions as to microfilming and its methods. Most states and the federal government have statutes admitting microphotographed records as evidence in courts if certain standards are met. Laws of the appropriate jurisdiction should be carefully studied. Generally, courts will admit microfilm copies of records, on the rule of best evidence, provided that there are *bona fide* reasons why the originals are not available. In microfilming noncurrent records for space reduction, therefore, one should see that information is filed either on the film itself or in accompanying administrative records (1) identifying the original records so that a court will know they would have been admissible, (2) proving that the reason for destruction of the original was free from suspicion of fraud, and (3) indicating (usually by a camera operator's certificate) that all documents were filmed and (usually by a subsequent inspection record) that the processed

film has been inspected and found complete and accurate.

#### CRITERIA FOR DECIDING TO FILM

In deciding whether or not to microfilm, and how, several questions should be asked. Are the records worth preserving on film? Will the total cost of microfilming and later use be less than the cost of preservation and use in paper form, including space costs? Can the records be so identified on film that they will serve as legal substitutes for the originals? Are the records of a type that it is practicable to microfilm them?

Experience throughout the country has gradually shown that certain types of records are more suitable for microfilming than others. Long series of clearly organized and identifiable records, such as many forms used for a single purpose, are easier to film satisfactorily than varied and complex material like correspondence. Files in which the arrangement is clearly fixed by an easily used scheme, or bound volumes in which the paging provides definite order, are more suitable than loosely filed papers. Physical uniformity as to color, size, and legibility of writing or printing is important. How much the camera can do with given types of material will probably have to be determined by an experienced technician, as will the kind of finding devices provided on the film and other important details. The kinds and amount of equipment necessary will depend on the size of the job and of the office, what kind of people will use the material, and how frequent the use will be. These considerations are all vital, but should not imply that only large offices can use microfilm. Small organizations with nonprofessional staffs can often use it effectively, but they will need technical advice in getting under way.

#### DISPOSAL AUTHORIZATION

If evaluation shows that certain records can be eliminated, that action should be taken only with due authorization in order to protect the interests of the government and the taxpayers. Laws for disposal authorization in this country were first passed to prevent willful destruction of records to cover up fraud. Now they are based as well on the need for preserving accountability for general administration and on research needs for records.

Many state laws, like the federal statute, recognize that approval for disposal is a cooperative



responsibility—and all of them should contain such recognition. Thus the usual pattern is a requirement that the agency possessing the records recommend their disposal to the public records office or comparable authority; the recommendation is passed upon by a panel consisting of the public records official or archivist, the attorney general or chief legal officer, and the auditor or comptroller; final approval is given by the governor or the chief executive officer of the governmental unit. In some states final approval must come from the legislature, as in the federal government. This is not to be recommended in the drafting of legislation, as disposal authorization is an administrative process and cannot be legislated. Final approval by the governor or other chief executive official is highly desirable, as it gives weight to the responsibility for the care of records. Appraisal by the archival authority is essential.

#### WHEN TO RETIRE—SCHEDULES

Action to eliminate or transfer noncurrent records should be a continuous program, rather than the result of occasional outbursts caused by space pressure. Government offices are by nature long-lived; their officials change often. Accordingly, offices can advantageously adopt systematic disposal or transfer schedules, which amount to lists of records with the time each kind is to be retained, and what is then to be done with it. Such schedules eliminate the need for new analyses and appraisals by succeeding officials except for changes in types of records. Many series accumulate under laws that have continuing effect, so that most records can be scheduled.

Retirement programs or schedules may involve two steps such as removal from current files to intermediate depositories, and ultimate disposal or transfer to an archival agency.

Much can be accomplished in efficiency of current operations by planning them in connection with retirement schedules. The filing of purchase orders and the related vouchers, for example, should be conditioned on whether or not they are eventually to be retained together, both disposed of, or to have different fates. Nonessential correspondence that can be defined clearly, such as requests for publications, can be separately filed and scheduled for disposal at stated intervals; but general correspondence that may include important policy material cannot be so easily scheduled,

and in any event should be separately filed in the first place.

#### MEANS OF DISPOSAL

Simple throwing away of useless records is adequate in small offices, where there is no likelihood of misuse of the information in the records, and no salvage value to the materials. Confidential character of information in records may require that they be shredded or macerated before being salvaged, or that they be burned. Personal supervision of the shredding or burning by a records officer gives added assurance. Waste paper contractors often are required to provide the shredding service. Waste paper, film, and sound recording material has salvage value if the quantity is substantial, especially in industrial areas.

#### RECORDS OF DISPOSAL ACTION

Any removal of records from official files should be noted for the protection of the custodian in case need arises for certain records, and in case questions arise as to why papers are no longer available. Disposal actions should be recorded by reports, card files, or annotations on disposal forms or schedules. The series of materials disposed of should be identified, with the dates covered, the volume of the records, when and by whom eliminated, and by what authority. This information may be of legal value, and is often useful in justification of functions for budget and other administrative purposes.

#### Archival Custody

What should an official of an operating agency of government know about, and expect of, the agency that cares for archives? Such an establishment, whether it be called an archives or a public records office, is an essential of good government from the administrator's, the research user's, and the general citizen's point of view.

#### WHAT ARE ARCHIVES?

In the first place, by "archival" custody is meant the care for records intact as bodies of materials representing the organizations which created or received and filed them. The word "archives" may apply to the administrative agency or to the records themselves. If the latter, it normally means the records of enduring value. To meet the definition, the records should be kept in the arrange-

ment of series set up by the office that originates the files, and not rearranged as individual pieces by subject. If a government does not have an archives or public records office, the preservation of archives may be performed by any other agency that has the interest and facilities to do the job. This may be an historical society or historical bureau. In the lack of any of these organizations especially equipped to care for manuscript material, libraries have often performed valuable service in preserving archives.

Offices having primary recording functions, such as those of county recorders, preserve and give information from archives, though they are not primarily archival agencies.

But many operating agencies of government do not normally keep or want to keep their noncurrent records. They are busy with the daily work that they were established to perform, and do not have the funds, the personnel, the facilities, or the time to care adequately for archives and to provide reference service on them. All too often, in fact, noncurrent records are a space problem to operating agencies, and unless someone has a special interest the records are treated as such instead of being given intelligent appraisal and handling. This is more true of fairly recent records — say those fifty years old — than it is of older, more clearly valuable files. The ideal situation is for a well-established archives to do the job.

Archives exist to preserve valuable records and to make them available to legitimate users. To do that best the archival agency needs to work continuously with the producing agencies, knowing the kinds of records they accumulate, being assured that current records management is adequate, and assisting in records evaluation and retirement. Any government official therefore should expect agents of the archives to survey his files, to consult with him on their arrangement and protection, to participate with him in appraisal, to effect disposal authorization, and to see that valuable records are transferred to the archives. Archivists can often give useful advice on current records problems. In this way the archives is properly a part of the administrative organization of government, and one that can promote effective management.

#### CONCENTRATION OF ARCHIVES

Centralization of archival functions in a complex government structure is often the safest and

most economical course. This problem arises especially in the relation of county to state government facilities. State governments generally have better resources for protecting valuable records, are better able to employ full-time trained personnel for archival work, and because of wider experience with users should provide greater breadth of knowledge in evaluation. Research students often find concentration of records from many counties convenient. The fact that county vital statistics records have the greatest interest to individual citizens makes particularly regrettable the tremendous losses by fire in past years in courthouses. Similar losses have occurred in state buildings, but not in archival buildings built as such.

Many county governments, however, take such pride in their valuable records that they have provided the best of facilities for them. This question must not be decided on the assumption that concentration — or decentralization — is always best. The records must be located where they can best be protected and used, and that depends in large measure on the interest taken in them by administrative officials, historians, or other persons influential enough to see that adequate provisions are made.

Whichever decision is reached, two points are vital. First, provisions should be made for "security copies" of vital county records. Action along these lines has been taken in several states by the making of microfilm or photostatic copies to be preserved at the state archives. Second, the state archives or records office, because of its acquaintance with advanced methods and with the kinds and availability of county records throughout the state, should provide advisory service to the counties on preservation of records.

#### TRANSFER TO ARCHIVAL CUSTODY

The actual transfer process should be simple, but sufficiently documented that legal title is clear and that the receiving establishment knows what it is getting. Experience has proved that the archives should have some choice as to what it takes, which is usually manifested in a requisition on the agency producing the records. Such requisition should be given weight by clearly defined legal procedure.

Most important in the transfer procedure is the transmittal of a document describing the records, explaining their origin, noting any indexes or other finding devices, stating any restrictions on

use, and signed by both parties as evidence of transfer. This is important for legal use when the archives produces records as evidence in court. It is vital to the archives to know what records it gets, their nature and value, how to use them, who may have access to them and under what conditions. On the last point the archival authorities should have some say, as they know many of the problems of access by experience.

#### ADMINISTRATIVE REQUISITES OF ARCHIVAL CUSTODY

The administrator of an agency transferring records to an archival agency has reason to expect that the latter will take good care of them and that he can get them back for occasional use if necessary. While he is not concerned in the details of archives administration, he can reasonably expect that the records he has produced will be kept in the order in which he filed them, as indeed they should be under basic archival principles. This is essential for his later administrative use, for validity of the records as evidence in court, and for their significance to research users.

The administrator will find it worth while to support the archival agency in its efforts to obtain resources in terms of trained personnel and physical facilities. It is to his interest to have the archives housed in safe buildings and equipment, kept readily accessible for use, and handled by intelligent people who will understand his needs. He should welcome their desire to know the history and activities of his agency, their interest in guarding the valuable records he produces, and their activity in promoting good records administration throughout the governmental structure.

Given this sort of cooperation by all agencies of the government, given a clear legal statement of functions, and given resources to work with, the archives or public records office can be both an important arm of government and an aid to research that will do much to foster in the citizens an understanding and appreciation of government.

#### What a Public Official Should Do about Records

The following steps should be taken by any public official, either on taking office or on becoming aware of the importance of records administration. He should:

1. Learn the laws and regulations governing rec-

ords creation, handling, use, disposal, and preservation.

2. Get acquainted with the officials of the archives or public records office of the government, or in lieu thereof with a historical society or library that will take an interest in public records.
3. See that receipts for records are given to the predecessor when a new official takes over, in exchange for a descriptive list of the files of the office.
4. Appraise the personnel handling records, and see that they are adequate as regards both competence and number.
5. Learn the general character of the files and the part they play in procedure.
6. Make or have made at least every two years, or better on a continuous inventory basis, a detailed survey of records on hand, providing information on titles of file series, descriptions of the records, their volume and rate of accumulation, method of arrangement, space and equipment used, available indexes, accessibility, restrictions on use, frequency and purposes of use, and existing practices of disposal or transfer.
7. Effect improvements in procedures if necessary for economy, protection, maximum utilization of records, or effective records retirement.
8. Provide a detailed manual of operating instructions.
9. Evaluate records on hand and in process of accumulation, and consult with legal and archival authorities on disposal or transfer.

#### Objectives of Records Legislation

Uniform wording of legislation is not feasible in as broad a field as that of records administration or with as great a variety as exists in the legal systems of state, county, municipal, and local government. The following major objectives, however, may be outlined:

1. Responsibility of public officials to create and maintain records of their policies and activities to provide accountability to the electorate.
2. Definition of records (See page 1 of this pamphlet.).
3. Safe custody in possession of responsible offices and in protective filing equipment.
4. Creation of important records on durable

- paper or other base and with durable ink, emulsion, or other medium.
5. Supervision of standards of care for records by state authorities, extending to state, county, municipal, and local government.
  6. Responsibility for maintenance in adequate arrangement and with due accessibility to the public.
  7. Requirement that each outgoing public official deliver the records of his office to his successor, each retaining a copy of a descriptive inventory and a receipt.
  8. Provision for furnishing certified copies of records for reasonable fees; and for admittance of certified copies (whether on paper, film, or other medium) as evidence in courts of the appropriate jurisdiction.
  9. Disposal of official records, or alienation of title, only on recommendation of the administrative official concerned; appraisal by the chief legal officer, the chief fiscal authority, and the archival authority; and final authorization by the governor or other chief executive official.
  10. Penalty for unlawful disposal or alienation of official records, including their removal by outgoing officials.
  11. A means by which the archival authority can recover by court action public records that have passed into private hands.
  12. Provision for transfer of records to intermediate depositories for custody, service, analysis, and evaluation pending their disposal or transfer to archival agency.
  13. Provision for transfer of valuable noncurrent records to the archival agency, with legal documentation of custody and descriptive inventories.
  14. Transfer of noncurrent valuable records of county and other local records to the state archival agency, or making of copies on paper, film, or other medium for security preservation in state archives.



## REFERENCES

Many references useful in records administration are available in state libraries, public libraries of large cities, and the libraries of state archives. The references suggested below do not constitute a complete bibliography, but rather a list of some of the most useful items. Inquiries as to the availability of the materials not found in libraries should be addressed to their publishers. Answers to many questions on records administration may be given, or the questions referred to other specialists, by the Secretary, the Society of American Archivists, Box 203, Williamsburg, Virginia; or the National Archives, Washington 25, D. C.

Two important periodical issuances should be noted on all phases of records administration:

1. *The American Archivist*, published quarterly by the Society of American Archivists. This journal includes an annual bibliography of writings in the field, a section dealing with microphotography, and special articles such as the following:

A. R. Newsome. "Uniform State Legislation," 2:1-16 (October, 1939).

Committee on Uniform State Legislation. "Proposed Uniform State Public Records Act," 3:107-15 (April, 1940).

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*Annual Reports* of state archives, notably those of Maryland, Delaware, North Carolina, and Mississippi, and of the National Archives at Washington, D. C., contain

notices of current developments, administrative and technical.

In addition, the following individual items will be found useful. Other articles on records administration appear in most of the periodicals cited:

3. American Historical Association, Public Archives Commission. *The Preservation of Local Archives; a Guide for Public Officials*. Washington, D. C., 1932. 16 pp. (Still a valuable brief statement, even though not up to date in some details. A few copies are still available from the Secretary of the Society of American Archivists.)

4. Albert B. Corey. "Records Obligations of Local Government Officers," *Town Clerks Topics* (91 State St., Albany, New York), 5: no. 4, p. 1-4 (October, 1946).

5. Christopher Crittenden and Doris Godard, comp. and ed. *Historical Societies in the United States and Canada; a Handbook*. Washington, D. C.: The American Association for State and Local History, 1944. (For information on historical societies that do or may serve as local archival agencies.)

6. Victor Gondos, Louis A. Simon, and William J. Van Schreeven. *Buildings and Equipment for Archives*, National Archives, *Bulletin No. 6*. Washington, D. C.: National Archives, 1944. 32 pp.

7. Interagency Records Administration Conference. "Records Management in Private Industry," by Bernard L. Brown, Frank M. Root, and Thomas L. Prather. Washington, D. C., 1948. (One of the transcripts of monthly meetings of the Conference, which deals with records problems in the federal government. Information on availability of other issuances may be obtained from the Secretary of the Conference at the National Archives, Washington 25, D. C.)

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